

PRESS RELEASE

Congressman John Conyers, Jr.

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CONYERS CALLS IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE INEFFICIENT, INEFFECTIVE AND INCOMPETENT

_____ Congressman John Conyers, Jr, Ranking Member of the House Judiciary Committee issued the following statement at today's Judiciary Full Committee Hearing on reconstructing the INS:

"If there is one thing that every member of the Committee can agree on, its that the Immigration and Naturalization Service is inefficient, ineffective, and in many respects, incompetent.

If there was any doubt in anyone's mind, it was eliminated on March 12 when we learned the INS had issued visas to the September 11 terrorists.

My problems with the INS go well beyond the low level bureaucratic snafus that are routinely tolerated at this agency. My concerns also stem from the fact that since September 11, the INS itself has flouted our laws and our democratic ideals in a misguided and shortsighted effort to pursue homeland security.

How else can we explain the fact that the INS has unilaterally chosen to close down immigration proceedings in this country? The situation was so intolerable, that I along with the Detroit Free Press, Detroit News, and ACLU brought suit against the INS for closing down routine immigration proceedings involving a prominent Muslim Cleric from Michigan, Imam Haddad. Last week the federal court agreed with me holding that 'openness is necessary for the public to maintain confidence in the value and soundness of the government's actions.'

Things have gotten so bad that the Justice Department's own Inspector General has launched an investigation into the treatment of these detainees.

Not only has the INS closed down immigration proceedings, it has detained more than 1,000 immigrants for unknown and unspecified reasons and without time limit. We have no idea who these individuals are, how they are being treated, or whether they even have counsel. We do know that only a single person out of all the detainees has been charged with terrorism, and he was detained prior to September 11.

The INS compounds these problems when they engage in selective law enforcement and racial profiling. Last week we learned that while more than 320,000 immigrants were subject to deportation, the INS was focusing its deportation efforts on 6,000 persons of Arab and Muslim descent. If equal protection means anything, it means you cannot single individuals out based on their race or religion, yet that is precisely what the INS is doing.

Certainly, we can begin to address some of the many problems facing the INS by separating its functions between enforcement and services. Tomorrow, Chairman Sensenbrenner and I, along with Mr. Gekas and Ms. Jackson Lee plan to mark-up compromise legislation that attempts to bridge the gaps between our respective approaches to restructuring.

But this is just the starting point. We need to work towards an INS that respects our differences and diversity as well as our laws and Constitution."